FOREWORD

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My next attempt to branch out was my first book:

ROCKET SHIP GALILEO.1 attempted book publication earlier than I had intended to because a boys' book was solicited from me by a major publisher. I was unsure of myself—but two highly respected friends, CleveCartmill and Fritz Lang, urged me to try it. So Idid. . . and the publisher who had asked for it rejected it.A trip to the Moon? Preposterous! He suggested that I submit another book-length MS without that silly space-travel angle.

Instead I sold it to Scribner's and thereby started a sequence: oneboys' book eachyeartimed for the Christmas trade. This lasted twelve years and was a very strange relationship, as my editor disliked science fiction, disliked me (a sentiment I learned to reciprocate), and kept me on for the sole reason that my books sold so well that they kept her department out of the red—her words. Eventually she bounced one with the suggestion that I shelve it for a year and then rewrite it.

But by bouncing it she broke the chain of options. Instead of shelving it, I took it across thestreet. . . and won a Hugo with it.

ROCKET SHIP GALILEO was a fumbling first attempt; I have never been satisfied with it. But it has never been out of print, has appeared in fourteen languages, and has earned a preposterous amount in book royalties alone; I should not kick. Nevertheless I cringe whenever I consider its shortcomings.

My next fiction (here following) was FREE MEN. Offhand it appears to be a routine post-Holocaust story, and the details—idioms, place names, etc.—justify that assumption. In fact it is any conquered nation in any century—

FREE MEN

"That makes three provisional presidents so far," the Leader said. "I wonder how many more there are?" He handed the flimsy sheet back to the runner, who placed it in his mouth and chewed it up like gum.

The third man shrugged. "No telling. What worries me—" A mockingbird interrupted. "Doity,doity , doity ," he sang."Terloo,terloo ,terloo ,purty-purtypurty-purty ."

The clearing was suddenly empty.

"As I was saying," came the voice of the third man in a whisper in the Leader's ear, "itain't how many worries me, but how you tell a de Gaulle from a Laval. See anything?"

"Convoy.Stopped below us."The Leader peered through bushes and down theside of a bluff. The high ground pushed out toward the river here, squeezing the river road between it and the water. The road stretched away to the left, where the valley widened out into farmland, and ran into the outskirts of Barclay ten miles away.

The convoy was directly below them, eight trucks preceded and followed by halftracks. The following halftrack was backing, vortex gun cast loose and ready for trouble. Its commander apparently wanted elbow room against a possible trap.

At the second truck helmeted figures gathered

aroundits rear end, which was jacked up. As the Leader watched he saw one wheeltemoved .

"Trouble?"

"I think not.Just a breakdown. They'll be gone soon." He wondered what was in the trucks.Food, probably. His mouth watered. A few weeks ago an opportunity like this would have meant generous rations for all, but the conquerors had smartened up.

He put useless thoughts away. "It's not that that worries me, Dad," he added, returning to the subject. "We'll be able to tell quislings from loyal Americans. But how do you tell men from boys?"

"Thinking of Joe Benz?"

"Maybe.I'd give a lot to know how far we can trust Joe. But I could have been thinking of young Morrie ."

"You can trust him."

"Certainly.At thirteen he doesn't drink—and he wouldn't crack if they burned his feet off.Same with Cathleen. It's not age or sex—but how can you tell? And you've got to be able to tell."

There was a flurry below. Guards had slipped down from the trucks and withdrawn from the road when the convoy had stopped, in accordance with an orderly plan for such emergencies.Now two of them returned to the convoy, hustling between them a figure not in uniform.

The mockingbird set up a frenetic whistling.

"It's the messenger," said the Leader."The dumb fool! Why didn't he lie quiet? Tell Ted we've seen it."

Dad pursed his lips and whistled: "Keewah,keewah ,keewah ,terloo ."

The other "mockingbird" answered, "Terloo," and shut up.

"We'll need a new post office now," said the Leader. "Take care of it, Dad."

"Okay."

"There's no real answer to the problem," the Leader said. "You can limit size of units, so that one

person can't give away too many—but take a colony like ours.

It needs to be a dozen or more to work. That means they all have to be dependable, or they all go down together.So each one has a loaded gun at the head of each other one."

Dad grinned, wryly. "Sounds like the United Nations before the Blow Off. Cheer up, Ed. Don't burn your bridges before you cross them."

"I won't. The convoy is ready to roll."

When the convoy had disappeared in the distance, Ed Morgan, the Leader, and his deputy Dad Carter stood up and stretched. The "mockingbird" had announced safety loudly and cheerfully. "Tell Ted to cover us into camp," Morgan ordered.

Dadwheepled and chirruped and received acknowledgement.They started back into the hills. Their route was roundabout and included check points from which they could study their back track and receive reports from Ted. Morgan was not worried about Ted being followed—he was confident that Ted could steal baby 'possums from mama's pouch. But the convoy breakdown might have been a trap—there was no way to tell that all of the soldiers had got back into the trucks. The messenger might have been followed; certainly he had been trapped too easily.

Morgan wondered how much the messenger would spill. He could not spill much about Morgan's own people, for the "post office" rendezvous was all that he knew about them.

The base of Morgan's group was neither better nor worse than average of the several thousand other camps of recalcitrant guerrillas throughout the area that once called itself the United States. The Twenty Minute War had not surprised everyone. The mushrooms which had blossomed over Washington, Detroit, and a score of other places had been shocking but expected—by some.

Morgan had made no grand preparations. He had simply conceived it as a good period in which to stay

footlooseand not too close to atalget area. He had taken squatter's rights in an abandoned mine and had stocked it with tools, food, and other useful items. He had had the simple intention to survive; it was during the weeks after Final Sunday that he discovered that there was no way for a man with foresight to avoid becoming a leader.

Morgan and Dad Carter entered the mine by a new shaft and tunnel which appeared on no map, by a dry rock route which was intended to puzzle even a bloodhound. They crawled through the tunnel, were able to raise their heads when they reached the armory, and stepped out into the common room of the colony, the largest chamber, ten by thirty feet and as high as it was wide.

Their advent surprised noone, else they might not have lived to enter. A microphone concealed in the tunnel had conveyed their shibboleths before them. The room was unoccupied save for a young woman stirring something over a tiny, hooded fire and a girl who sat at a typewriter table mounted in front of a radio. She was wearing earphones and shoved one back and turned to face them as they came in.

"Howdy, Boss!"

"Hi, Margie.What's the good word?" Then to the other, "What's for lunch?"

"Bark soup and a notch in your belt."

"Cathleen, you depress me."

"Well . . . mushrooms fried in rabbit fat, but darn few of them."

"That's better."

"You better tell your boys to be more careful what they bring in. One more rabbit with tularemia and we won't have to worry about what to eat."

"Hard to avoid, Cathy.You must be sure you handle them the way Doc taught you." He turned to the girl."Jerry in the upper tunnel?"

"Yes."

"Get him down here, will you?"

"Yes, sir."She pulled a sheet out of her typewriter and handed it to him, along with others, then left the room.

Morgan glanced over them. The enemy had abolished soap opera and singing commercials but he could not say that radio had been improved. There was anunnewsy sameness to the propaganda which now came over the air. He checked through while wishing for just one old-fashioned, uncensored newscast.

"Here's an item!" he said suddenly. "Get this, Dad—"

"Read it to me, Ed." Dad's spectacles had been broken on Final Sunday. He could bring down a deer, or a man, at a thousand yards—but he might never read again.

"'New Center, 28 April—Itis with deep regret that Continental Coordinating Authority for World Unification, North American District, announces that the former city of St. Joseph, Missouri, has been subjected to sanitary measures. It is ordered that a memorial plaque setting forth the circumstances be erected on the former site of St. Joseph as soon as radioactivity permits. Despite repeated warnings the former inhabitants of this lamented city encouraged and succored marauding bands of outlaws skulking around the outskirts of their community. It is hoped that the sad fate of St. Joseph will encourage the native authorities of all North American communities to take all necessary steps to suppress treasonable intercourse with the few remaining lawless elements in our continentalsoci

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ety.

Dad cocked a brow at Morgan. "How many does that make since they took over?"

"Let's see. . . Salinas . . . Colorado Springs . . . uh, six, including St. Joe."

"Son, there weren't more than sixty million Americans left after Final Sunday. If they keep up, we'll

be kind of thinned out in a few years."

"I know." Morgan looked troubled. "We've got to work out ways to operate without calling attention to the towns.Too many hostages."

A short, dark man dressed in dirty dungarees entered from a side tunnel, followed by Margie. "You wanted me, boss?"

"Yes, Jerry. I want to get word to McCracken to come in for a meeting. Two hours from now, if he can get here."

"Boss, you're using radio too much. You'll get him shot and us, too."

"I thought that business of bouncing it off the cliff face was foolproof?"

"Well . . . a dodge I can work up, somebody else can figure out. Besides, I've got the chassis unshipped. I was working on it."

"How long to rig it?"

"Oh, half an hour—twenty minutes."

"Do it. This may be the last time we'll use radio, except as utter last resort."

"Okay, boss."

The meeting was in the common room. Morgan called it to order once all were present or accounted for. McCracken arrived just as he had decided to proceed without him. McCracken had a pass for the countryside, being a veterinarian, and held proxy for the colony's underground associates in Barclay.

"The Barclay Free Company, a provisional unit of the United States of America, is now in session." Morgan announced formally. "Does any member have any item tolay before the Company?"

He looked around; there was no response. "How about you?" he challenged Joe Benz. "I heard that you had some things you thought the Company ought to hear.

Benz started to speak, shook his head. "I'll wait."

"Don't wait too long," Morgan said mildly. "Well, I have two points to bring up for discussion—"

"Three," corrected Dr. McCracken. "I'm glad you sent for me." He stepped up to Morgan and handed him a large, much folded piece of paper. Morgan looked it over, refolded it, and put it in his pocket.

"It fits in," he said to McCracken. "What do the folks in town say?"

"They are waiting to hear from you. They'll back you up—so far, anyway."

"All right."Morgan turned back to the group. "First item—we got a message today, passed by hand

and about three weeks old, setting up another provisional government. The courier was grabbed right under our noses. Maybe he was a stooge; maybe he was careless—that's neither here nor there at the moment. The message was that the Honorable Albert M. Brockman proclaimed himself provisional President of these United States, under derived authority, and appointed Brigadier General Dewey Fenton commander of armed forces including irregular militia—meaning us—and called on all citizens to unite to throw the Invader out.All formal and proper. So what do we do about it?"

"And who the devil is the Honorable Albert M. Brockman?" asked someone in the rear.

"I've been trying to remember. The message listed government jobs he's held, including some assistant secretary job—I suppose that's the 'derived authority' angle. But I can't place him."

"I recall him," Dr. McCracken said suddenly. "I met him when I was in the Bureau of Animal Husbandry. A career civilservant. . . and a stuffed shirt."

There was a gloomy silence. Ted spoke up. "Then why bother with him?"

The Leader shook his head. "It's not that simple, Ted. We can't assume that he's no good. Napoleon might have been a minor clerk under different circumstances. And the Honorable Mr. Brockman may be a revolutionary genius disguised as a bureaucrat. But that's not the point. We need nationwide unification

morethan anything. It doesn't matter right now who the titular leader is. The theory of derived authority may be shaky but it may be the only way to get everybody to accept one leadership. Little bands like ours can never win back the country. We've got to have unity—and that's why we can't ignore Brockman."

"The thing that burns me," McCracken said savagely, "is that it need never have happened at all! It could have been prevented."

"No use getting in a sweat about it," Morgan told him. "It's easy to see the government's mistakes now, but just the same I think there was an honest effort to prevent war right up to the last. It takes all nations to keep the peace, but it only takes one to start a war."

"No, no, no—I don't mean that, Captain," McCracken answered. "I don't mean the War could have been prevented. I suppose it could have been—once. But everybody knew that another war could happen, and everybody—everybody, I say, knew that if it came, it would start with the blasting of American cities. Every congressman, every senator knew that a war would destroy Washington and leave the country with no government, flopping around like a chicken with its head off. They knew—why didn't they do something!"

"What could they do? Washington couldn't be protected."

"Do? Why, they could have made plans for their own deaths! They could have slapped through a constitutional amendment calling for an alternate president and alternate congressmen and made it illegal for the alternates to be in target areas—or any scheme to provide for orderly succession in case of disaster. They could have set up secret and protected centers of government to use for storm cellars. They could have planned the same way a father takes out life insurance for his kids. Instead they went stumbling along, fat, dumb, and happy, and let themselves get killed, with no provision to carry out their sworn duties after they were dead. Theory of 'derived authority,'pfui ! It's not

justdisastrous; it's ridiculous! We used to be the greatest country in the world—now look at us!"

"Take it easy, Doc," Morgan suggested. "Hindsight is easier than foresight."

"Hummm!I saw it coming. I quit my Washington job and took a country practice, five years ahead of time. Why couldn't a congressman be as bright as I am?"

"Hmmm. . .well— you're right. But we might just as well worry over theDred Scott Decision. Let's get on with the problem. How about Brockman?Ideas?"

"What do you propose, boss?"

"I'd rather have it come from the floor."

"Oh, quit scraping your foot, boss," urged Ted. "We elected you to lead."

"Okay. I propose to send somebody to backtrack on the message and locate Brockman—smell him out and see what he's got. I'll consult with as many groups as we can reach in this state and across the river, and we'll try to manage unanimous action. I was thinking of sending Dad andMorrie ."

Cathleen shook her head. "Even with faked registration cards and travel permits they'd be grabbed for the Reconstruction Battalions. I'll go."

"In a pig's eye," Morgan answered. "You'd be grabbed for something a danged sight worse. It's got to be a man."

"I am afraid Cathleen is right," McCracken commented. "They shipped twelve-year-old boys and old men who could hardly walk for the Detroit project. They don't care how soon the radiation gets them—it's a plan to thin us out."

"Are the cities still that bad?"

"From what I hear, yes. Detroit is still 'hot' and she was one of the first to get it."

"I'm going to go." The voice was high and thin, and rarely heard in conference.

"Now, Mother—" said Dad Carter.

"You keep out of this, Dad. The men and young women would be grabbed, but theyWon't bother with me. All I need is a paper saying I have a permit to rejoin my grandson, or something."

McCracken nodded. "I can supply that."

Morgan paused,then said suddenly, "Mrs. Carter will contact Brockman. It is so ordered. Next order of business," he went on briskly. "You've all seen the news about St. Joe—this is what they posted in Barclay last night." He hauled out and held up the paper McCracken had given him. It was a printed notice, placing the City of Barclay on probation, subject to the ability of "local authorities" to suppress "bands of roving criminals."

There was a stir, but no comment. Most of them had lived in Barclay; all had ties there.

"I guess you're waiting for me," McCracken began. "We held a meeting as soon as this was posted. We weren't all there—it's getting harder to cover up even the smallest gathering—but there was no disagreement. We're behind you but we want you to go a little easy. We suggest that you cut out pulling raids within, oh, say twenty miles of Barclay, and that you stop all killing unless absolutely necessary to avoid capture. It's the killings they get excited about—it was killing of the district director that touched off St. Joe."

Benz sniffed. "So we don't do anything. We just give up—and stay here in the hills and starve."

"Let me finish, Benz. We don't propose to let them scare us out and keep us enslaved forever. But casual raids don't do them any real harm. They're mostly for food for the Underground and for minor retaliations. We've got to conserve our strength and increase it and organize, until we can hit hard enough to make it stick. We won't let you starve. I can do more organizing among the farmers and some animals can be hidden out, unregistered. We can get you meat—some, anyhow. And we'll split our rations with you. They've got

uson 1800 calories now, but we can share it. Something can be done through the black market, too. There are ways."

Benz made a contemptuous sound. Morgan looked at him.

"Speak up, Joe. What's on your mind?"

"I will. It's not a plan; it's a disorderly retreat. A year from now we'll be twice as hungry and no further along—and they'll be better dug in and stronger. Where does it get us?"

Morgan shook his head. "You've got it wrong. Even if we hadn't had it forced on us, we would have been moving into this stage anyhow. The Free Companies have got to quit drawing attention to themselves . Once the food problem is solved we've got to build up our strength and weapons. We've got to have organization and weapons—nationwide organization and guns, knives, and hand grenades. We've got to turn this mine into a factory. There are people down in Barclay who can use the stuff we can make here—but we can't risk letting Barclay be blasted in the meantime. Easy does it."

"Ed Morgan, you're kidding yourself and you know it."

"How?"

"'How?'Look, you sold me the idea of staying on the dodge and joining up—"

"You volunteered."

"Okay, I volunteered. It was all because you were so filled with fire and vinegar about how we would throw the enemy back into the ocean. You talked about France and Poland and how the Filipinos kept on fighting after they were occupied. You sold me a bill of goods. But there was something you didn't tell me—"

"Go on."

"There never was an Underground that freed its own country. All of them had to be pulled out of the soup by an invasion from outside. Nobody is going to pull us out."

There was silence after this remark. The statement

hadtoo much truth in it, but it was truth that no member of the Company could afford to think about. YoungMorrie broke it."Captain?"

"Yes,Morrie ."Being a fighting man,Morrie was therefore a citizen and a voter.

"How can Joe be so sure he knows what he's talking about? History doesn't repeat. Anyhow, maybe we will get some help.England, maybe-or even the Russians.

Benz snorted. "Listen to the punk! Look, kid, England was smashed like we were, only worse—and Russia, too. Grow up; quit daydreaming."

The boy looked at him doggedly. "You don't know that. We only know what they chose to tell us. And there aren't enough of them to hold down the whole world, everybody,everywhere . We never managed to lick theYaquis , or theMoros . And they can't lick us unless we let them. I've read some history too."

Benz shrugged. "Okay, okay. Now we can all sing 'My Country 'Tisof Thee' and recite the Scout oath. That ought to makeMorrie happy—"

"Take it easy, Joe!"

"We have free speech here, don't we? What I want to know is: How long does this go on? I'm getting tired of competing with coyotes for the privilege of eating jackrabbits. You know I've fought with the best of them. I've gone on the raids. Well, haven't I? Haven't I? You can't call me yellow."

"You've been on some raids," Morgan conceded.

"All right.I'd go along indefinitely if I could see some sensible plan. That's why I ask, 'How long does this go on?' When do we move?Next spring? Next year?"

Morgan gestured impatiently. "How do I know? It may be next spring; it may be ten years. The Poles waited three hundred years."

"That tears it," Benz said slowly. "I was hoping you could offer some reasonable plan. Wait and arm ourselves—that's a pretty picture! Homemade hand grenades against atom bombs! Why don't you quit

kiddingyourselves? We're licked!" He hitched at his belt. "The rest of you can do as you please—I'm through."

Morgan shrugged. "If a man won't fight, I can't make him. You're assigned noncombatant duties. Turn in your gun. Report to Cathleen."

"You don't get me, Ed. I'm through."

"You don't get me, Joe. You don't resign from an Underground."

"There's no risk. I'll leave quietly, and let myself be registered as a straggler. It doesn't mean anything to the rest of you. I'll keep my mouth shut—that goes without saying."

Morgan took a long breath, then answered, “Joe, I’ve learned by bitter experience not to trust statements set off by ‘naturally,’ ‘of course,’ or ‘that goes without saying.’”

“Oh, so you don’t trust me?”

“As Captain of this Company I can’t afford to. Unless you can get the Company to recall me from office, my rulings stand. You’re under arrest. Hand over your gun.

Benz glanced around, at blank, unfriendly faces. He reached for his waist, “With your left hand, Joe!”

Instead of complying, Benz drew suddenly, backed away. “Keep clear!” he said shrilly. “I don’t want to hurt anybody—but keep clear!”

Morgan was unarmed. There might have been a knife or two in the assembly, but most of them had come directly from the dinner table. It was not their custom to be armed inside the mine.

YoungMorrie was armed with a rifle, having come from lookout duty. He did not have room to bring it into play, but Morgan could see that he intended to try. So could Benz.

“Stop it,Morrie !” Morgan assumed obedience and turned instantly to the others. “Let him go. Nobody move. Get going, Joe.”

“That’s better.” Benz backed down the main tunnel, toward the main entrance, weed and drift choked for

years. Its unused condition was their principal camouflage, but it could be negotiated.

He backed away into the gloom, still covering them. The tunnel curved; shortly he was concealed by the bend.

Dad Carter went scurrying in the other direction as soon as Benz no longer covered them. He reappeared at once, carrying something. “Heads down!” he shouted, as he passed through them and took out after Benz.

“Dad!” shouted Morgan. But Carter was gone.

Seconds later a concussion tore at their ears and noses.

Morgan pickedhimself up and brushed at his clothes, saying in annoyed tones, “I never did like explosives in cramped quarters.Cleve—Art. Go check on it.Move!”

“Right, boss!” They were gone.

“The rest of you get ready to carry out withdrawal plan—full plan, with provisions and supplies. Jerry, don’t disconnect either the receiver ortheline -of-sight till I give the word. Margie will help you. Cathleen, get ready to serve anything that can’t be carried. We’ll have one big meal. ‘The condemned ate hearty.’”

“Just a moment, Captain.”McCracken touched his sleeve. “I had better get a message into Barclay.”

“Soon as the boys report.You better get back into town.”

"I wonder. Benz knows me. I think I'm here to stay."

"Hm.. .well, you know best.How about your family?"

McCracken shrugged. "They can't be worse off than they would be if I'm picked up. I'd like to have them warned and then arrangements made for them to rejoin me if possible."

"We'll do it. You'll have to give me a new contact."

"Planned for.This message will go through and my number-two man will step into my shoes. The name is Hobart—runs a feed store on Pelham Street."

Morgan nodded. "Should have known you had it

workedout. Well, what we don't know—" He was interrupted by Cleve, reporting.

"He got away, Boss."

"Why didn't you go after him?"

"Half the roof came down when Dad chucked the grenade. Tunnel's choked with rock. Found a place where I could see but couldn't crawl through. He's not in the tunnel."

"How about Dad?"

"He's all right. Got clipped on the head with a splinter but not really hurt."

Morgan stopped two of the women hurrying past, intent on preparations for withdrawal. "Here—Jean, and you, Mrs. Bowen. Go take care of Dad Carter and tell Art to get back here fast. Shake a leg!"

When Art reported Morgan said, "You and Cleve go out and find Benz. Assume that he is heading for Barclay. Stop him and bring him in if you can. Otherwise kill him. Art is in charge. Get going." He turned to McCracken."Now for a message." He fumbled in his pocket for paper, found the poster notice that McCracken had given him, tore off a piece, and started to write. He showed it to McCracken. "How's that?" he asked.

The message warned Hobart of Benz and asked him to try to head him off. It did not tell him that the Barclay Free Company was moving but did designate the "post office" through which next contact would be expected—the men's rest room of the bus station.

"Better cut out the post office," McCracken advised. "Hobart knows it and we may contact him half a dozen other ways. But I'd like to ask him to get my family out of sight. Just tell him that we are sorry to hear that Aunt Dinah is dead."

"Is that enough?"

Yes.

"Okay." Morgan made the changes,then called, "Margie! Put this in code and tell Jerry to get it out

fast. Tell him it's the strike-out edition. He can knock down his sets as soon as it's out."

"Okay, boss." Margie had no knowledge of cryptography. Instead she had command of jive talk, adoléscent slang, and high school double-talk which would be meaningless to any but another American bobbysoxer. At the other end a fifteen-year-old interpreted her butchered English by methods which impressed her foster parents as being telepathy—but it worked.

The fifteen-year-old could be trusted. Her entire family, save herself, had been in Los Angeles on Final Sunday.

Art and Cleve had no trouble picking up Benz's trail. His tracks were on the tailings spilling down from the main entrance to the mine. The earth and rock had been undisturbed since the last heavy rain; Benz's flight left clear traces.

But trail was cold by more than twenty minutes; they had left the mine by the secret entrance a quarter of a mile from where Benz had made his exit.

Art picked it up where Benz had left the tailings and followed it through brush with thewoodsmanship of the Eagle Scout he had been. From the careless signs he left behind Benz was evidently in a hurry and heading by the shortest route for the highway. The two followed him as fast as they could cover ground, discarding caution for speed.

They checked just before entering the highway. "See anything?" asked Cleve.

‘ ‘l\lo . ~

"Which way would he go?"

"The Old Man said to head him off from Barclay."

"Yeah, but suppose he headed south instead?He used to work inWickamton . He might head that way."

"The Boss said to cover Barclay. Let's go."

They had to cache their guns; from here on it would be their wits and their knives. An armed American on a highway would be as conspicuous as a nudist at a garden party.

Their object now was speed; they must catch up with him, or get ahead of him and waylay him.

Nine miles and two and a half hours later-one

hundred and fifty minutes of dog trot, with time lost lying in the roadside brush when convoys thundered past—they were in the outskirts of Barclay. Around a bend, out of sight, was the roadblock of the Invaders' check station. The point was a bottleneck; Benz must come this way if he were heading for Barclay.

"Is he ahead or behind us?" asked Cleve, peering out through bushes.

"Behind, unless he was picked up by a convoy-or sprouted wings. We'll give him an hour."

A horse-drawn hayrack lumbered up the road. Cleve studied it. Americans were permitted no power vehicles except under supervision, but this farmer and his load could go into town with only routine check at the road block. "Maybe we ought to hide in that and look for him in town."

"And get a bayonet in your ribs? Don't be silly."

"Okay. Don't blow your top." Cleve continued to watch the rig. "Hey," he said presently. "Get a load of that!"

"That" was a figure which dropped from the tail of the wagon as it started around the bend, rolled to the ditch on the far side, and slithered out of sight.

"That was Joe!"

"Are you sure?"

"Sure! Here we go."

"How?"Art objected. "Take it easy. Follow me." They faded back two hundred yards, to where they could cross the road on hands and knees through a drainage pipe. Then they worked up the other side to where Benz had disappeared in weeds.

They found the place where he had been; grass and weeds were still straightening up. The route he must have taken was evident—down toward the river bank, then upstream to the city. There were drops of blood. "Dad must have missed stopping him by a gnat's whisker," Cleve commented.

Bad job hedidn t.

"Another thing—he said he was going to give himself up. I don't think he is, or he would have stayed

withthe wagon and turned himself in at the check station. He's heading for some hideout. Who does he know in Barclay?"

"I don't know. We'd better get going."

"Wait a minute. If he touches off an alarm, they'll shoot him for us. If he gets by the 'eyes,' we've lost him and we'll have to pick him up inside. Either way, we don't gain anything by blundering ahead. We've got to go in by the chute."

Like all cities the Invader had consolidated, Barclay was girdled by electric-eye circuits. The enemy had trimmed the town to fit, dynamiting and burning where necessary to achieve unbroken sequence of automatic sentries. But the "chute"—an abandoned and forgotten aqueduct—passed under the alarms. Art knew how to use it; he had been in town twice since Final Sunday.

They worked back up the highway, crossed over, and took to the hills. Thirty minutes later they were on the streets of Barclay, reasonably safe as long as they were quick to step off the sidewalk for the occasional Invader.

The first "post office," a clothesline near their exit, told them nothing—the line was bare. They went to the bus station. Cleve studied the notices posted for inhabitants while Art went into the men's rest room. On the wall, defaced byscrawlings of every sort, mostly vulgar, he found what he sought: "Killroy was here." The misspelling ofKilroy was the clue—exactly eighteen inches below it and six to the right was an address: "1745 Spruce—ask for Mabel."

He read it as 2856 Pine-one block beyond Spruce. Art passed the address to Cleve, then they set out separately, hurrying to beat the curfew but proceeding with caution—at least one of them must get through. They met in the backyard of the translated address. Art knocked on the kitchen door. It was opened a crack by a middle-aged man who did not seem glad to see them. "Well?"

"We're looking for Mabel."

"Nobody here by that name."

"Sorry," said Art. "We must have made a mistake." He shivered. "Chilly out," he remarked. "The nights are getting longer."

"They'll get shorter by and by," the man answered.

"We've got to think so, anyhow," Art countered.

"Come in," the man said. "The patrol may see you." He opened the door and stepped aside. "My name's Hobart. What's your business?"

"We're looking for a man named Benz. He may have sneaked into town this afternoon and found someplace to—"

"Yes, yes," Hobart said impatiently. "He got in about an hour ago and he's holed up with a character namedMoyland ." As he spoke he removed a half loaf of bread from a cupboard, cut four slices, and added cold sausage, producing two sandwiches. He did not ask if they were hungry; he simply handed them to Art and Cleve.

"Thanks,pal. So he's holed up. Haven't you done anything about it? He has got to be shut up at once or he'll spill his guts."

"We've got a tap in on the telephone line. We had to wait for dark. You can't expect me to sacrifice good boys just to shut his mouth unless it's absolutely necessary.

"Well, it's dark now, and we'll be the boys you mentioned. You can call yours off."

"Okay." Hobart started pulling on shoes.

"No need for you to stick your neck out," Art told him. "Just tell us where thisMoyland lives."

"And get your throat cut, too. I'll take you."

"What sort of a guy is thisMoyland ? Is he safe?"

"You can't prove it by me. He's a black market broker, but that doesn't prove anything. He's not

part of the organization but we haven't anything against him."

Hobart took them over his back fence, across a dark side street, through a playground, where they lay for several minutes under bushes because of a false alarm,

thenthrough many more backyards, back alleys, and dark byways. The man seemed toh~tve a nose for the enemy; there were no more alarms. At last he brought them through a cellar door into a private home. They went upstairs and through a room where a woman was nursing a baby. She looked up, but otherwise ignored them. They ended up in a dark attic. "Hi, Jim," Hobart called out softly. "What's new?"

The man addressed lay propped on his elbows, peering out into the night through opera glasses held to slots of a ventilatinglouvre . He rolled over and lowered the glasses, pushing one of a pair of earphones from his head as he did so. "Hello, Chief.Nothing much. Benz is getting drunk, it looks like."

"I'd like to know whereMoyland gets it," Hobart said. "Has he telephoned?"

"Would I be doing nothing if he had? A couple of calls came in, but they didn't amount to anything, so I let him talk."

How do you know they didn't amount to anything?" Jim shrugged, turned back to thelouvre . " Moylandjust pulled down the shade," he announced.

Art turned to Hobart. "We can't wait. We're going

Benz arrived atMoyland's house in bad condition. The wound in his shoulder, caused by Carter's grenade, was bleeding. He had pushed a handkerchief up against it as a compress, but his activity started the blood again; he was shaking for fear his condition would attract attention before he could get under cover.

Moylandanswered the door. "Is that you, Zack?" Benz demanded, shrinking back as he spoke.

"Yes. Who is it?"

"It's me—Joe Benz. Let me in, Zack—quick!"

Moylandseemed about to close the door,then suddenly opened it. "Get inside." When the door was bolted, he demanded, "Now—what's your trouble? Why come to me?"

"I had to go someplace, Zack. I had to get off the street. They'd pick me up."

Moylandstudied him. "You're not registered.Why not?"

Benz did not answer.Moyland waited,then went on, "You know what I can get for harboring a fugitive. You're in the Underground—aren't you?"

"Oh, no, Zack!I wouldn't do that to you. I'm just a— a straggler. Igotta get registered, Zack."

"That's blood on your coat.How?"

"Uh.. . just an accident. Maybe you could let me have clean rags and some iodine."

Moylandstared at him, his bland face expressionless,then smiled. "You've got no troubles we can't fix. Sit down." He stepped to a cabinet and took out a bottle of bourbon, poured three fingers in a water glass, and handed it to Benz. "Work on that and I'll fix you up.

He returned with some torn toweling and a bottle. "Sit here with your back to the window, and open your shirt. Have another drink. You'll need it before I'm through."

Benz glanced nervously at the window. "Why don't you draw the shade?"

"It would attract attention. Honest people leave their shades up these days. Hold still. This is going to hurt."

Three drinks later Benz was feeling better.Moyland seemed willing to sit and drink with him and to soothe his nerves. "You did well to come in,"Moyland told him. "There's no sense hiding like a scared rabbit. It's just butting your head against a stone wall. Stupid."

Benz nodded. "That's what I told them."

"Told who?"

"Hunh?Oh, nobody. Just some guys I was talking to.Tramps."

Moylandpoured him another drink. "As a matter of fact you were in the Underground."

"Me? Don't be silly, Zack."

"Look, Joe, you don't have to kid me. I'm your friend. Even if you did tell me itwOuldn't matter. In the first place, I wouldn't have any proof. In the second place, I'm sympathetic to the Underground—any American is. I just think they're wrong-headed and foolish. Otherwise I'd join 'em myself."

"They're foolish all right! You can say that again."

"So you were in it?"

"Huh? You're trying to trap me. I gave my word of honor—"

"Oh, relax!"Moyland said hastily. "Forget it. I didn't hear anything; I can't tell anything. Hear noevil, see no evil—that's me." He changed the subject.

The level of the bottle dropped whileMoyland explained current events as he saw them. "It's a shame we had to take such a shellacking to learn our lesson but the fact of the matter is, we were standing in the way of the natural logic of progress. There was a time back in '45 when we could have pulled the same stunt ourselves, only we weren't bright enough to do it.World organization, world government. We stood in the way, so we got smeared. It had to come. A smart man can see that."

Benz was bleary but he did not find this comment easy to take. “Look, Zack—you don’t mean you like what happened to us?”

“Like it?Of course not. But it was necessary. You don’t have to like having a tooth pulled—but it has to be done. Anyhow,” he went on, “it’s not all bad. The big cities were economically unsound anyway. We should have blown them up ourselves. Slum clearance, you might call it.”

Benz banged his empty glass down. “Maybe so—but they made slaves out of us!”

“Take it easy, Joe,”Moyland said, filling his glass, “you’re talking abstractions. The cop on the corner could push you around whenever he wanted to. Is that freedom? Does it matter whether the cop talks with an Irish accent or some other accent? No, chum, there’s a

lotof guff talked about freedom. No man is free. There is no such thing as freedom. There are only various privileges. Free speech—we’re talking freely now,aren’t we? After all, you don’t want to get up on a platform and shoot off your face.Free press? When did you ever own a newspaper? Don’t be a chump. Now that you’ve shown sense and come in, you are going to find that things aren’t so very different. A little more orderly and no more fear of war, that’s all. Girls make love just like they used to, the smart guys get along, and the suckers still get the short end of the deal.”

Benz nodded. “You’re right, Zack. I’ve been a fool.”

“I’m glad you see it. Now take those wild men you were with. What freedom have they got? Freedom to starve, freedom to sleep on the cold ground, freedom to be hunted.”

“That was it,” Benz agreed. “Did you ever sleep in a mine, Zack?Cold. Thatain’t half of it. Damp, too.”

“I can imagine,”Moyland agreed. “TheCapehart Lode always was wet.”

“It wasn’t theCapehart ; it was theHarkn —” He caught himself and looked puzzled.

“TheHarkness , eh?That’s the headquarters?”

“I didn’t say that! You’re putting words in my mouth! You—”

“Calm yourself, Joe. Forgetit.”Moyland got up and drew down the shade. “You didn’t say anything.”

“Of course I didn’t.” Benz stared at his glass. “Say, Zack, where do I sleep? I don’t feel good.”

“You’ll have a nice place to sleep any minute now.”

“Huh? Well, show me. Igotta fold up.”

“Any minute.You’ve got to check in first.”

“Huh? Oh, I can’t do that tonight, Zack. I’m in no shape.”

“I’m afraid you’ll have to. See me pull that shade down? They’ll be along any moment.”

Benz stood up, swaying a little. “You framed me!” he yelled, and lunged at his host.

Moylandsidestepped, put a hand on his shoulder

andpushed him down into the chair. "Sit down, sucker," he said pleasantly. "You don't expect me to get A-bombed just for you and your pals, do you?"

Benz shook his head,then began to sob.

Hobart escorted them out of the house, saying to Art as they left," If you get back, tell McCracken that Aunt Dinah is resting peacefully."

"Okay."

"Give us two minutes,then go in. Good luck."

Cleve took the outside; Art went in. The back door was locked, but the upper panel was glass. He broke it with the hilt of his knife, reached in and unbolted the door. He was inside whenMoyland showed up to investigate the noise.

Art kicked him in the belly,then let him have the point in the neck as he went down. Art stopped just long enough to insure thatMoyland would stay dead,then went looking for the room where Benz had been when the shade was drawn.

He found Benz in it. The man blinked his eyes and tried to focus them, as if he found it impossible to believe what he saw. "Art!" he got out at last."Jeez, boy! Am I glad to see you! Let's get out of here—this place is 'hot.'

Art advanced, knife out.

Benz looked amazed. "Hey, Art! Art! You're making a mistake. Art. You can't do this—" Art let him have the first one in the soft tissues under the breast bone, then cut his throat to be sure. After that he got out quickly.

Thirty-five minutes later he was emerging from the country end of the chute. His throat was burning from exertion and his left arm was useless—he could not tell whether it was broken or simply wounded.

Cleve lay dead in the alley behindMoyland's house, having done a good job of covering Art's rear.

It took Art all night and part of the next morning to get back near the mine. He had to go through the hills

theentire way; the highway was, he judged, too warm at the moment.

He did not expect that the Company would still be there. He was reasonably sure that Morgan would have carried out the evacuation pending certain evidence that Benz's mouth had been shut. He hurried.

But he did not expect what he did find—a helicopter hovering over the neighborhood of the mine.

He stopped to consider the matter. If Morgan had got them out safely, he knew where to rejoin. If they were still inside, he had to figure out some way to help them. The futility of his position depressed him-one man, with a knife and a bad arm, against a helicopter.

Somewhere abluejay screamed and cursed. Without much hope he chirped his own identification. Thebluejay shut up and a mockingbird answered him— Ted.

Art signaled that he would wait where he was. He considered himself well hidden; he expected to have to signal again when Ted got closer, but he underestimated Ted's ability. A hand was laid on his shoulder.

He rolled over, knife out, and hurt his shoulder as he did so. "Ted! Man, do you look good to me!"

"Same here.Did you get him?"

"Benz? Yes, but maybe not in time. Where's the gang?"

"A quarter mile north of back door.We're pinned down. Where's Cleve?"

"Cleve's not coming back. What do you mean 'pinned down'?"

"That damned 'copter can see right down the draw we're in. Dad's got 'emunder an overhang and they're safe enough for the moment, but we can't move."

"What do you mean 'Dad's got 'em'?" demanded Art. "Where's the Boss?"

"Heain't in such good shape, Art.Got a machine gun slug in the ribs. We had a dust up. Cathleen's dead."

"The hell you say!"

"That's right. Margie and Maw Carter have got her baby. But that's one reason whywe"re pinned down— the Boss and the kid, I mean."

A mockingbird's call sounded far away. "There's Dad," Ted announced. "We got to get back."

"Can we?"

"Sure. Just keep behind me. I'll watch out that I don't get too far ahead."

Art followed Ted in, by a circuitous and, at one point, almost perpendicular route. He found the Company huddled under a shelf of rock which had been undercut by a stream, now dry. Against the wall Morgan was on his back, with Dad Carter and Dr. McCracken squatting beside him. Art went up and made his report.

Morgannodded, his face gray with pain. His shirt had been cut away; bandaging was wrapped around his ribs, covering a thick pad. "You did well, Art.Too bad about Cleve. Ted, we're getting out of here and you're going first, because you're taking the kid."

"The baby?How—"

"Doc'lldope it so that it won't let out a peep. Then you strap it to your back, papoose fashion."

Ted thought about it."No, to my front. There's some knee-and-shoulder work on the best way out."

"Okay. It's your job."

"How do you get out, boss?"

"Don't be silly."

"Look here, boss, if you think we're going to walk off and leave you, you've got another—"

"Shut up and scram!" The exertion hurt Morgan; he coughed and wiped his mouth.

"Yes, sir."Ted and Art backed away.

"Now, Ed—" said Carter.

"You shut up, too. You still sure you don't want to be Captain?"

"You know better than that, Ed. They took things from me while I was yourdeppity , but they wouldn't have me for Captain."

"That puts it up to you, Doc."

McCracken looked troubled. "They don't know me that well, Captain."

"They'll take you. People have an instinct for such things."

"Anyhow, if I am Captain, I won't agree to your plan of staying here by yourself. We'll stay till dark and carry you out."

"And get picked up by an infrared spotter, like sitting ducks? That's supposing they let you alone until sundown—that other 'copter will be back with more troops before long."

"I don't think they'd let me walk off on you."

"It's up to you to make them. Oh, I appreciate your kindly thoughts, Doc, but you'll think differently as soon as you're Captain. You'll know you have to cut your losses."

McCracken did not answer. Morgan turned his head to Carter. "Gather them around, Dad."

They crowded in, shoulder to shoulder. Morgan looked from one troubled face to another and smiled. "The Barclay Free Company, a provisional unit of the United States of America, is now in session," he announced, his voice suddenly firm. "I'm resigning the captaincy for reasons of physical disability.Anynommat ions?"

The silence was disturbed only by calls of birds, the sounds of insects.

Morgan caught Carter's eyes. Dad cleared his throat. "I nominate Doc McCracken."

"Any other nominations?"He waited,then continued, "All right, all in favor of Doc make it known by raising your right hand. Okay-opposed the same sign. Dr. McCracken is unanimously elected. It's all yours, Captain. Good luck to you."

McCracken stood up, stooping to avoid the rock overhead. "We're evacuating at once. Mrs. Carter, give the baby about another tablespoon of the syrup, then help Ted. He knows what to do. You'll follow Ted.

Then Jerry.Margie, you are next. I'll assign the others presently. Once out of the canyon, spread out and go it alone. Rendezvous at dusk, same place as under Captain Morgan's withdrawal plan—the cave." He paused. Morgan caught his eye and motioned him over, "That's all until Ted and the baby are ready to leave. Now back away and give Captain Morgan a little air."

When they had withdrawn McCracken leaned over Morgan the better to hear his weak words. "Don't be too sure you've seen the last of me, Captain. I might join up in a few days."

"You might at that. I'm going to leave you bundled up warm and plenty of water within reach. I'll leave you some pills, too—that'll give you some comfort and ease. Only half a pill for you—they're intended for cows." He grinned at his patient.

"Half a pill it is. Why not let Dad handle the evacuation? He'll make you a good deputy—and I'd like to talk with you until you leave."

"Right."He called Carter over, instructed him, and turned back to Morgan.

"After you join up with Powell's outfit," whispered Morgan, "your first job is to get into touch with Brockman. Better get Mrs. Carter started right away, once you've talked it over with Powell."

''I will.''

"That's the most important thing we've got to worry about, Doc. We've got to have unity, and one plan, from coast to coast. I look forward to a day when there will be an American assigned, by name, to each and every one of them.Then at a set time—zzzt!" He drew a thumb across his throat.

McCracken nodded."Could be. It will be. How long do you think it will take us?"

"I don't know. I don't think about 'how long'.Two years, five years, ten years—maybe a century. That's not the point. The only question is whether or not there are any guts left in America." He glanced out where the fifth person to leave was awaiting a signal

fromCarter, who in turn was awaiting a signal from Art, hidden out where he could watch for the helicopter. "Those people will stick."

"I'm sure of that."

Presently Morgan added, "There's one thing this has taught me: You can't enslave a free man. Only person can do that to a man ishimself. No, sir—you can't enslave a free man. The most you can do iskill him."

"That's a fact, Ed."

"It is. Got a cigarette, Doc?"

"It won't do you any good, Ed."

"It won't do me any harm, either—now, will it?"

"Well, not much." McCrackenunregretfully gave him his last and watched him smoke it.

Later, Morgan said, "Dad's ready for you, Captain.So long."

"So long.Don't forget.Half a pill at a time. Drink all the water you want, but don't take your blankets off, no matter how hot you get."

"Half a pill it is. Good luck."

"I'll have Ted check on you tomorrow." Morgan shook his head. "That's too soon.Not for a couple of days at least."

McCracken smiled. "I'll decide that, Ed. You just keep yourself wrapped up. Good luck." He withdrew to where Carter waited for him. "You go ahead, Dad. I'll bring up the rear. Signal Art to start."

Carter hesitated. "Tell me straight, Doc. What kind of shape is he in?"

McCracken studied Carter's face,then said in a low voice, "I give him about two hours."

"I'll stay behind with him."

"No, Dad, you'll carry out your orders." Seeing the distress in the old man's eyes, he added, "Don't you worry aboutMorgan. A free man can take care of himself. Now get moving."

"Yes, sir."